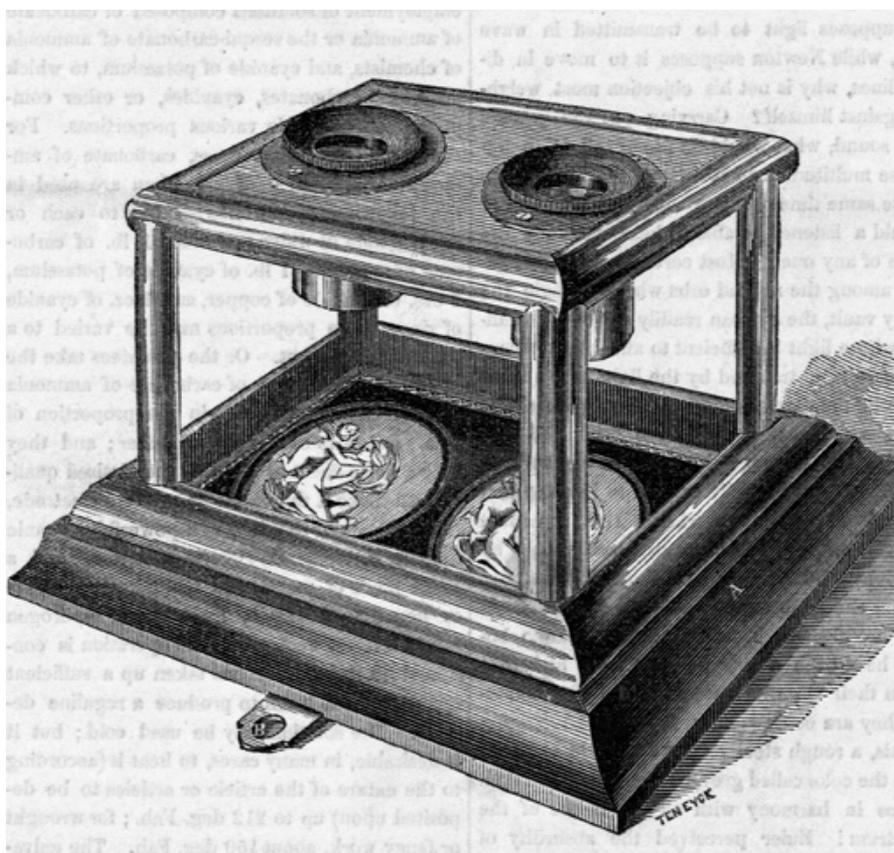


Society in relief (& in stereo!)

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In his wonderful book, *Les Merveilles de la Science, ou Description Populaire des Inventions Modernes*, (*The Wonders of Science, or a Popular Description of Modern Inventions*), Louis Figuier underlines a surprising and important fact: that the invention of the stereoscope predates the invention of photography. The first was developed by Charles Wheatstone in 1838, while Daguerre's invention was not made public until a presentation by l'Académie des Sciences on January 7th of 1839. For Figuier, these inventions are linked by more than just their almost simultaneous discoveries. They mark an important step in our understanding of the mechanics of representation. It's as though the one had to arrive exactly when it did so that we could fully understand the value and importance of the other.

It would appear, however, that photography has played a more important role in our relationship to visible representation, offering up instantaneous snapshots and surface impressions of a truly flat world, navigable in the blink of an eye.

In this age of 3D films, when even 3D printers are becoming commonplace, we nevertheless often find ourselves struggling to understand the logical principles of our perception. But the principle of all principles, applicable to photography as well as to stereoscopy, and to art in general, remains unchanged: that it's the viewer who makes the picture*. In the case of stereoscopy, there's a curious *trompe l'œil* at work. Our eyes form two adjoining 2D images, which combine to create a single "3D image." It's by crossing these two different perspectives that the brain conjures up the relief. We carry out this work of binocular arithmetic behind the scenes, without even consciously realizing it. And oddly, this imperceptible operation goes on adding, subtracting, and comparing automatically. Independent of our will. It's as though we fashion our entire representation of the world on autopilot.

* "C'est le regardeur qui fait le tableau" – Marcel Duchamp

While we're on the subject, we might mention that Wheatstone, the inventor of the stereoscope, was also the inventor of the pseudoscope, an optical instrument that reverses depth perception. For our senses to register such discontinuities is by definition impossible. They have certain physiological limits. What gives the impression of relief in stereoscopy is the recomposition of multiple planes, which simplifies and defines the space. To put something into relief is to clarify the distinction between these planes, thus revealing the empty space between them; in other words, it is to show the invisible.

We are committed enough to the understatement of our binocular vision that we can imagine, with a little analogy and exaggeration, that Markus's double portraits suggest a process based on the principles of stereoscopy. In *Other People's Feelings...* the two images are different, but if you get a bit of distance, and see them in the right focus, they present a view of one sole thing: empathy. But how can we see, and how can we show, this concept that denotes our "understanding" of the feelings and emotions of others? And then which otherness are we talking about? That of the model or that of the artist? That's the question that Markus's deep gaze pushes through the prism of his double portraits. And there is a triangulation of looks that pass through this prism. I am looking at a double photo: of the model looking at Markus, of Markus looking at his model, and finally, of them both looking back out at me in more or less the same way. Through this play on the effects of a look, the little differences, the negligible similarities, we are brought face-to-face with a no man's land between empathy and indifference. In each new portrait, Markus invents planes through which to perceive society, and when they intersect they allow us to see the portrait from a higher dimension. This casting into relief of the social link between beings, the society in relief, in fact results in quite a singular portrait: the portrait of our humanity.